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RUEHDBU/AMEMBASSY DUSHANBE PRIORITY 3753
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL PRIORITY 1894
RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PRIORITY 7154
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS PRIORITY
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY 0798
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE PRIORITY 2040
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 0128

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 TASHKENT 001664

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DEPT FOR SCA/CEN, DRL, AND PRM; MOSCOW FOR DHS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/19/2017

TAGS: [PREF PHUM](#) [PREL AF TI UZ](#)

SUBJECT: UNHCR TO REASSESS REFUGEES AS PRESSURE MOUNTS

REF: TASHKENT 1494

Classified by: POLOFF TIM BUCKLEY FOR REASONS 1.4 (B, D).

11. (C) Summary: DCM met with United Nations Development Program (UNDP) Resident Representative Fikret Akcura on September 17 to discuss the status of Afghan refugees. DCM conveyed that all DHS interviews have been completed but any new candidates put forth by UNHCR and any successful appeals will be considered. However, at least one-fifth of refugees are known to have links to the Soviet-era regime in Afghanistan, which makes it difficult to identify resettlement options. DCM suggested that UNDP approach Russia and Australia as alternatives, and UNDP also plans to ask Canada and Scandinavian countries to consider accepting them. UNDP reported that a UNHCR team will reassess the status of all Afghan refugees in October, which should yield some new candidates for DHS interview and pare down the number of bona fide refugees who remain. Meanwhile, the GOU is continuing to apply pressure in an effort to remove all refugees, citing their relative prosperity and travel habits. UNHCR is considering relocating refugees to Kyrgyzstan, which would be an exception to its policy of not sending refugees to a third-party nation. However, this is also politically complex. End summary.

STATUS OF DHS INTERVIEWS

12. (C) On September 17 DCM met with UNDP's Akcura to discuss the status of the remaining Afghan refugees in Uzbekistan. DCM informed Akcura that DHS received a list of 796 candidates from UNHCR (although 1,000 were expected) and completed interviews for all refugees who showed up for their appointments. There were a substantial number of no-shows, partly attributed to the possibility that some refugees have returned to Afghanistan. DCM confirmed that DHS has no additional pending interviews, though some cases may be reinterviewed based on successful appeals. IOM and UNHCR have provided information to refugees on how to prepare appeals, so the number of appealed cases may increase. DCM also noted that if additional names of refugees are put forth, post will request DHS to send its interviewing staff from Moscow to conduct the interviews.

UNHCR TEAM TO UPDATE STATUS DETERMINATIONS

13. (C) UNDP reported that staff from UNHCR visited Uzbekistan recently and concluded that a thorough review of the status of refugees is necessary. UNHCR will send a team (consisting of staff from Bishkek and other locations) in October, and it will report new findings immediately thereafter. UNDP expects that approximately 30 additional cases (totalling 100 refugees) will likely be deemed eligible for submission to DHS for consideration. UNDP asked how quickly DHS could interview newly identified eligible cases, to which DCM responded that post would suggest to DHS the end of the calendar year as a reasonable target date. Post will keep DHS officers in Moscow informed about the progress of UNHCR's assessment. Akcura noted that only UNHCR has the authority to make a final submission of eligible refugees, but he said "UNDP will push them because life here is becoming very tough for the refugees". UNDP reports that the GOU has been cooperative in issuing visas for the intended UNHCR staff.

PRESSURE ON REFUGEES REMAINS HIGH

14. (C) Akcura's staff noted that just last week some refugees who have already been selected to go to the USA were harassed and had their documents confiscated by police. UNDP successfully retrieved them only by providing guarantees that these refugees are leaving. Mr. Akcura has "a strong sense that the police have been instructed to make life difficult for the refugees". In a recent UNDP meeting with First Deputy FM Nematov, in which Akcura pleaded for the GOU "to go easy on the issue until next year", he also could sense pressure "from higher levels" to get the refugees out of Uzbekistan as quickly as possible. Akcura said he pointed out that, even if the refugees obtained the expensive visas

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TASHKENT 00001664 003 OF 003

COMMENT

19. (C) The upcoming reassessment by the UNHCR team in October will likely result in a smaller list of bona fide refugees, since some have apparently gone home and the team may respond to UNDP pressure to eliminate some of the economic refugees from the rolls. UNDP is clearly frustrated with UNHCR's slow pace of activity regarding the refugees but points out UNDP has "no mandate or capacity to assess the refugees nor would UNHCR accept it" if they attempted their own efforts. DHS is likely to be presented with additional candidates to interview, as well as some appeals, but a number of refugees will still remain in need of assistance. Akcura's concern that the GOU will "push refugees across the border" to Afghanistan appears well-founded.

NORLAND